

2013 Annual Report



What We Accomplished

Highlights - RI Land Trust Council expanded the new programs started in 2012 and had another very successful year. Top accomplishments:

- ✓ **Conservation defense legislation passed** - - helps to protect land that is conserved with conservation easements from condemnation. Now, Rhode Island is one of the few states that **provides conservation lands some protection from condemnation.**
- ✓ **Launched a website for land trust trail information** by adding a new section to **ExploreRI**. The website now has **trail maps and information for more than 45 land trust trail networks**. Now, for the first time, people can find information about many of Rhode Island's land trust trails in one place.
- ✓ Sponsored the **2nd Land Trust Days to increase the visibility of land trusts** and the special places they are protecting. **37 land trusts and partners organized 58 activities in communities across the state.**
- ✓ Organized the **2013 Land & Water Conservation Summit** in partnership with peers from watershed organizations and conservation commissions. The 10th Anniversary of the Summit, had capacity attendance, 30 workshops, keynote on storytelling and lunch time performance by award winning singer, songwriter and storyteller.
- ✓ Sponsored **workshops on Conservation Easement Amendments and Preparing Baseline Documents.**
- ✓ Land Trust Excellence Project (a partnership with Land Trust Alliance) **provided consulting support to help 7 land trusts** improve their standards and practices.
- ✓ Convened and **facilitated gatherings for land trust leaders from neighboring land trusts** so that they could explore opportunities for working together. The Council facilitated two of these meetings in 2013.

State Legislative & Policy Work

- **2013 was RI Land Trust Council's 10th consecutive year of legislative success in Rhode Island.** The Council is the land trust community's voice at the Statehouse. We pursue legislation that supports land trusts and land conservation and defends our land conservation accomplishments. In 2013 the Council:
 - Initiated and promoted legislation **passed** by the General Assembly that helps to **safeguard land protected with conservation easements from condemnation.** This legislation requires agencies that are condemning land to notify conservation easement holders and RIDEM at the same time they notify property owners of their plans to condemn the property. Rhode Island is the 3rd state (North Carolina and California) to have legislation that provides some protection from condemnation for land with conservation easements. *Thank you to the legislative sponsors Senator Sosnowski and Representative Walsh.*
 - Initiated and promoted legislation to establish the **RI Community Preservation Act.** This was **not adopted** by the General Assembly. This legislation would replicate a very successful Massachusetts program for funding land conservation by giving local governments the authority to establish a dedicated funding program for land conservation, parks development and historic preservation. This legislation also creates

a state funding system to provide matching funds to the municipalities that adopt a local program. The Council's partners promoting this legislation include: Preserve RI, Trust for Public Land, Grow Smart RI, and RI Coalition for the Homeless. *Thank you to the sponsors Senator DiPalma and Representative Ruggiero.*

- Opposed several bills that would be detrimental to land conservation and stewardship. The most significant legislation proposed to eliminate liability protection for municipalities and the state when people are using public land for outdoor recreation. (Towns and the state currently benefit from very strong liability protection.) Another bill proposed changes to Providence Water which owns the Scituate reservoir and 1000's of acres of 'protected' buffer lands.
 - Alerted other conservation organizations about legislation proposing to **limit local government authority to protect steep slopes, wetlands and groundwater** during land development. (This was land use legislation and was not directly related to land conservation so RI Land Trust Council did not testify on this legislation. We did provide opponents with advice about the legislative process.) Despite broad opposition, versions of this legislation were approved: one bill passed that restricts municipal authority to protect steep slopes from development during subdivision; a second bill to limit municipal Wetlands & Septic System Setback Requirements was significantly amended in response to opposition. The second bill that passed requires Statewide Planning to prepare a report (in consultation with a Task Force) for the Governor and General Assembly with recommendations for statewide setback regulations for wetlands and septic systems.
- **Agriculture Conservation - the Council is continuing our work to improve farm conservation policies and practices.** These efforts build on the recommendations from the forum we held in February 2010: *FarmRI 2.0 – Crafting the next generation of farm conservation strategies.* The Council:
- Is a member of American Farmland Trust's - ***Keep New England Farmland in Farming*** project. We participated in a May 8 New England convening for federal and state agency staff and land conservation leaders involved in farmland protection.
 - Is an active member of the RI Agriculture Partnership which developed a 5-year *Rhode Island Agriculture Strategic Plan* and is working on implementation.
 - Is participating in the RI Food Policy Council's initiatives to improve the availability of farmland for new farmers. We helped with the research and review of a policy paper prepared by Harvard Food Law & Policy Clinic on land linking in Rhode Island.
- New Statewide Planning guidance document for **municipal Comprehensive Plan Updates - "Planning for Natural Resources."** The Council provided Statewide Planning with background information and recommended improvements to the previous guidance document.

Additional Highlights of Council Initiatives: Networking, Capacity Building & Resources

- **10th Land & Conservation Water Summit** - our signature event of the year - held March 9, 2013 at the University of Rhode Island Memorial Union - offered 30 workshops and was attended by over 300 people.
- Keynote Speaker: Steve Archibald - Education & Outreach Specialist from the Arthur Carhart National Wilderness Training Center in Montana. His talk, ***"Not a storyteller? Perhaps it's time to reconsider!"*** discussed the importance of storytelling for explaining land and water conservation and recruiting new supporters to our work.
 - Celebrating the Summit's 10th anniversary, we had a lunchtime performance by award-winning singer-songwriter and storyteller Bill Harley.

- **Presentation of RI Land Trusts' 2012 Top Accomplishments** - Paul Roselli (Council Board Member & Burrillville Land Trust President) once again gave an inspiring report at the Council's Annual meeting. The collective impact of land trusts across the state is incredible.
- **2nd Land Trust Days** - August 1 - September 29 was a great success! Land Trust Days was initiated to:
 - **increase the visibility of land trusts and the special places that they are protecting** that are open to the public in communities across the state; and
 - encourage more people to get outdoors, find and enjoy the protected land in their communities.

37 organizations participated in Land Trust Days and 58 activities were organized. There was more than a 10% increase in land trust participation from the initial year of Land Trust Days. The opening press event, held at Southside Community Land Trust, was attended by both Governor Chafee and Mayor Taveras. Four land trusts held community festivals during Land Trust Days (Block Island Conservancy, Tiverton Land Trust, West Greenwich Land Trust, Prudence Conservancy). Over 2,800 people participated in land trust day activities. An average of 29 people attended each trail walk with the highest attendance of 90 at Hopkinton Land Trust's walk.

This year, the Council partnered with the YMCA of Greater Providence to market Land Trust Days. We also had an intern from Brown University's Impact Providence program who helped coordinate marketing for Land Trust Days. Prizes for the Land Trust Days "challenge" were donated by REI, Whole Foods, Granny Squib Ice Teas, Bill Harley (autographed book), Helen Tjader (gardening tools) and Steve Wood (music cd). Land Trust Days continues to be a catalyst for partnerships between land trusts and between land trusts and other community organizations. Funding for Land Trust Days was provided by the Prospect Hill Foundation and a RI Department of Environmental Management Trail Grant.

- **Land Trust Trails Website Launched** - to increase public awareness and use of land trusts' trails. The Council is gathering trail maps and posting them on a common website: ***ExploreRI.org***. Now for the first time, people looking for a place to walk can find information about many land trust trails. The Council is collaborating with the Blueways Alliance which developed ***ExploreRI*** for paddling routes and boat launching locations. The Council expanded ***ExploreRI*** to include maps and information for land trust trails. The Council is helping some land trusts get their trails mapped and also prepared trail safety information for the website. The trail maps section of ***ExploreRI*** "went live" at the 2013 Land & Water Summit. ***ExploreRI*** already has over 45 trail systems and more are being added as land trusts get maps prepared. Partial funding for the Council's trail map initiative is being provided by a grant from the Conservation Stewardship Collaborative Endowment at the Rhode Island Foundation and a RIDEM Trail Grant.
- The RI Land Trust Council Website - www.RILandTrusts.org - continues to be expanded and additional information added. The site provides information about the Council and provides links to: land trusts around the state; our agriculture videos and reports; and other resource information. In addition, the Council is a lead partner of Rhode Island Land & Water Partnership which maintains a companion website: www.landandwaterpartnership.org with an **on-line stewardship library**. As previously mentioned, the Council is also a partner of the ExploreRI website for trail information.
- **Implementing the Land Trust Excellence Partnership with the National Land Trust Alliance (Alliance)** - RI Land Trust Council and the Alliance are working together to help land trusts across the state implement Standards and Practices – the nationally recognized best practices for land conservation. In 2012, we began to provide consulting support to four land trusts (Barrington, Foster, Hopkinton, Land Conservancy of North Kingstown) to help

them implement their priority Standards and Practices. In spring 2013, we issued a RFP for land trusts that wanted help developing policies and procedures and systems for managing their documents. Four land trusts (Land Conservancy of North Kingstown, Gloucester, Cumberland and Narrow River) received support from the Alliance circuit rider in 2013. Partial funding for this initiative is being provided by a Rhode Island Foundation Strategy Grant.

- **Workshops** - The Council continues to offer workshops for land trust leaders (board members, etc.) on a variety of topics based on needs and opportunities that arise. In 2013 we held two workshops in partnership with the Alliance as part of our Land Trust Excellence Initiative:
 - **RI Conservation Easement Amendments: Protecting Land Forever & Recent Legislative Changes** was held on Thursday, November 14 in collaboration with the Attorney General's office and Leslie Ratley-Beach - Conservation Defense Director, Land Trust Alliance. This workshop was geared for attorneys and focused on the legislation that the Council initiated and promoted to improve safeguards for land protected by conservation easements.
 - **Preparing Baseline Documentation for Your Protected Lands** was held on Saturday, December 7. This workshop, led by Carol Lynn Trocki, promoted the Conservation Stewardship Collaborative protocol for preparing Baseline Documentation. Council board member Paul Roselli videotaped this workshop and the video is available at the Council's website along with workshop materials. A video of the "Fundraising for Stewardship" workshop that we sponsored in December 2012 is available on the Council's website.
- **Regional Convenings** - The Council convened and facilitated 2 gatherings of land trust leaders from neighboring land trusts. Rhode Island has more than 45 land trusts. Many are struggling to find adequate capacity to fulfill their missions. The Council is facilitating meetings of board members from neighboring land trusts to help them explore opportunities for collaboration and partnerships.
- **Coalitions & Representing Land Trusts in Statewide Forums** - The Council continues to represent the state's land trust community in statewide coalitions, partnerships and policy discussions so that land trusts' interests are included in decisions and initiatives.
- **Conservation Stewardship Collaborative (CSC)** - The Council represents the land trust community as one of 7 members of this coalition. The CSC is working to improve stewardship of Rhode Island's protected lands and is supported by an endowment at the Rhode Island Foundation established by the Sharpe Family. **CSC initiatives benefit land trusts and their stewardship work.** Specifically, CSC gave grants in 2012 and 2013 for:
 - the Council's state policy work;
 - helping land trusts map their trails and get these posted on ExploreRI;
 - developing a monitoring protocol for land trusts;
 - developing web based system where land trusts can file back-up copies of their baseline documents for protected lands;
 - creating volunteer teams to help land trusts with stewardship activities including mapping and blazing their trails

See the CSC website for details of projects funded: www.ricsc.org

- **Land Trust E-news** - the Council continues to promote networking and communications among land trusts with a periodic e-news and action alerts. Additional emails are sent to leaders of each land trust (presidents, chairs and executive directors).

How We Accomplished this: Grants & Funding Support

The RI Land Trust Council's work is made possible by the contribution of **100s of hours of volunteer time and expertise by the Council's Board members and land trust leaders** from across the state. The Council's work is funded by generous contributions from land trusts (our members), foundations and other organizations and individuals.

We appreciate this support that makes our work possible!

Land Trusts Supporting RI Land Trust Council in 2013

**** Land Trusts that increased their support in 2013 above their 2012 dues contribution**

- Aquidneck Land Trust
- Audubon Society of Rhode Island**
- Barrington Land Conservation Trust
- Block Island Conservancy
- Block Island Land Trust
- Bristol Land Conservation Trust
- Burrillville Land Trust
- Charlestown Land Trust**
- Cumberland Land Trust
- East Greenwich Land Trust
- East Providence Land Conservation Trust
- Foster Land Trust
- Gloucester Land Trust**
- Hopkinton Land Trust
- Little Compton Ag. Conservancy Trust
- North Smithfield Land Trust
- Narragansett Land Conservancy Trust
- Narrow River Land Trust
- Neutaconkanut Hill Conservancy
- Prudence Conservancy
- RI Farm Bureau Land Trust
- Richmond Rural Preservation Land Trust
- Sakonnet Preservation Association
- Shelter Harbor Conservation Society**
- Smithfield Land Trust
- South Kingstown Land Trust**
- Southside Community Land Trust
- Tiverton Land Trust
- Tiverton Open Space Commission**
- Watch Hill Conservancy
- Weekapaug Foundation for Conservation
- The Westerly Land Trust
- West Greenwich Land Trust**

Grants & Major Donations

Thank you to these foundations, organizations and individuals for their generous contributions to the RI Land Trust Council in support of land conservation and land trusts' work across the state:

The Rhode Island Foundation

Conservation Stewardship Endowment @ The Rhode Island Foundation

van Beuren Charitable Foundation

Prince Charitable Trusts

Prospect Hill Foundation

Sharpe Family Foundation/Julie & Henry Sharpe III

Hazard Family Foundation

Mr. and Mrs. Kenneth Woodcock

RI Department of Environmental Management Trail Grant

Bafflin Foundation

United Natural Foods

Don McCluskey

Anonymous contribution

Board Members (current & former) of RI Land Trust Council

Thank YOU for supporting the RI Land Trust Council's Work!

Roy Najdecki, President

Rupert Friday, Executive Director